

A Mother's Embrace by firelily-jade

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Summary: Set during S01E7: The Bathtub. Eleven ponders a budding relationship with Joyce Byers. Oneshot.

A Mother's Embrace

"You are so brave..."

Joyce Byers' kind words echoed in Eleven's consciousness as she waded into the pool. She could feel Joyce's firm but gentle grip, guiding her through the bath.

Eleven never knew what it was like to have a mother. However, if she *had* had one, El hoped that she would be like Joyce. The woman, although a bit frenetic and anxious, was extremely kind and warm. Very rarely had Eleven ever experienced anything like it, much less from an adult. Mike and the others were one thing, but she found that she could never quite trust older people.

She let herself drift into the world of her mind, as her consciousness flew out into the sinister alternate dimension. She let the bath's numbing powers help her concentrate as her world went dark.

In no time, El had found Barb. Seeing Barb's cold, withered body sent her into a state of shock. It was almost worse than witnessing the monster itself. She began to scream and writhe.

"Gone! GONE!"

All of a sudden, she heard gentle whispers coming from all around her.

"It's okay... I'm here... it's okay..."

"I'm here..."

El paused, turning away from Barb's corpse as she let Joyce's soothing voice wash over her. She could almost feel the woman holding her steady, as if she were there beside her in that cold and lonely world.

She had to find Will.

If not for Mike and the others, then for the pleading, worrying woman who was currently keeping her grounded and sane. She had to find Will before whatever happened to Barb happened to him.

"Castle... Byers...," she let herself speak once she had found him. She heard Joyce's voice again, breaking through her reverie.

"Tell him to stay right there... tell him Mom is coming..."

Eleven did as she was instructed, holding Will's hand. He looked near death, but she knew there was hope for him yet. She was more determined than ever before to save him. She had only known Joyce for a short while, but she wanted to see the woman happy again. She wanted to cause happiness and joy, not pain and regret. She didn't want to mess everything up again.

Her trance was broken, then, as she sat up in the bath, gasping for air like she had been submerged under it. As she took off the dark goggles, she could feel Joyce reaching for her, pulling her close as Eleven let the rush of emotions take her over.

She cried in Joyce's arms, then, and couldn't fathom why Joyce would remain there, comforting her, instead of immediately rushing off to save her son.

Eleven had never felt warmth like this before. She had never been comforted like this before, especially after such a draining use of her powers. Her "papa" had held her, but his embrace was eerie and cold compared to the warm embrace of a woman she barely knew.

Is this what it's like to have a mother?

Eleven didn't want it to ever stop.